

Text: John 5:31-47

Title: "Believe Because of the Father's Witness"

Time: 7/28/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We are in the throes of an election year in a severely divided nation. As Christians, we recognize that our government of the people, by the people, and for the people has been ordained by God for our nation, so we (the people) are called to vote as citizens who must hold our government accountable, and we are called to pray as a church for religious freedom, that we might live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

In support of their candidate, each side of the political divide is busy calling witnesses to testify to the fitness of their chosen leader and to the unfitness of their opponent. The party conventions call many witnesses to testify in this way. Favorite media outlets are called to testify in this way. We are being asked again to believe these witnesses.

In the end, after parties and voters have done all they can do to fulfill their God-given responsibilities, the President-elect chosen in November will be the one God has appointed for us, whether in mercy or in judgment on our nation. The prophet Daniel told a proud Nebuchadnezzar, "Seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:25).

Today, there are pretenders to the ministry that Daniel had as God's prophet who endeavor to make news headlines. They have claimed to speak for God about the eventual winner of the coming election.

One headline told of Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the founder of Believers' LoveWorld Incorporated in Ghana, who (we are

told) predicted in 2020 that Joe Biden would step down and that Kamala Harris would become the next U.S. President. By way of contrast, Johnny Enlow, a Pentecostal pastor in California, has testified that God told him that Donald Trump would be President again.

Clearly, it is one thing for witnesses to communicate well at a political party convention or take a position in mainstream media, and quite another for someone to claim that God has told him who is going to win.

In our passage, Jesus claims that God the Father has told Him that He will win. Jesus is not running for political office. His purpose is not to obtain political power. Instead, Jesus claims that God the Father is His witness for the sake of others (v. 34, “these things I say, that ye might be saved”; v. 40, “that ye might have life”). As the purpose of the Gospel of John states, in order for sinners to be saved, we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name.

The sinners Jesus seeks to save in this passage do not believe. In fact, they desire to kill Jesus (v. 18). In response, Jesus has shown in verses 19-30 of this chapter that His works and the Father’s works are the same works. Did the Father create the universe? So did Jesus. Does the Father control and provide for the universe according to His plan? So does Jesus. Does the Father reveal Himself as God to mankind? So does Jesus. Does the Father save sinners from sin? So does Jesus. Does the Father judge between right and wrong? So does Jesus.

And now beginning in verse 31, Jesus responds further to the unbelief of these men by telling them that God the Father Himself has witnessed to the truth of His claim, that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that we must believe in His name to have eternal life (vv. 31-32).

It is important to note as we read verse 31 that whatever Jesus says is true, whether or not anyone else witnesses to its truth, because Jesus is God's Son, and He cannot lie. His word is ultimate authority, and as such, it is self-attesting and valid on its own merits. Jesus affirms this about His word in John 8:14, "Though I bear record of Myself, yet my record is true."

What He is saying in 5:31 is simply that if there were no other witnesses, then his claim in verse 30 would not be true, where He claims that the Father gives witness to who He is.

So, in our passage this morning, Jesus tells us how the Father has given this witness to the truth about His Son, Jesus Christ. The Father communicates this witness in three ways.

I. The Father bore witness to Jesus through John the Baptist (vv. 33-35).

Illustration: One of the lessons this past week at Summer Bible Camp told of the confusion of language at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. For the craft that day, the kids were asked to build a tower out of toothpicks and marshmallows.

The marshmallows were a bit too soft and mushy to hold the towers up, so the kids had trouble keeping them from leaning over and falling down. Along with the Tower of Babel, these towers of marshmallow and toothpick were good illustrations of the weakness of our accomplishments apart from God.

Application: Political allegiance can be a lot like those marshmallows, too soft and mushy to hold up a cause. Many Jews who became excited about John the Baptist were soft and mushy. When John the Baptist came on the scene, they sent people to him. They were overjoyed by the way John opposed Herod and other political leaders they despised. They were excited that John spoke of the coming Messiah after him, whom they hoped would free them from Roman oppression.

But this excitement, this political allegiance, only lasted for a season (v. 35, “an hour”).

One of the tragedies of gospel ministry is that some get excited about the Lord for a short time, but then show their true colors when the excitement is over by falling away. John the Baptist bore witness to the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that we must have life in His name. He was faithful to death as God’s burning and shining lamp of truth. Jesus did not learn the truth through John, but He tells us that we should so that we can be saved (v. 34).

Do you believe what John the Baptist said about Jesus, that He is the Christ, the Son of God? Do you have life in Jesus’s name? Like John, do you want to be a lit and shining lamp, faithful unto death for our Lord, and not merely excited about spiritual things for only a short season? The Father bore witness to Jesus through John the Baptist. What will we do with that witness?

II. The Father bore witness to Jesus by sending Him to work (v. 36).

Illustration: John Paul Jones is remembered today as the “Father of the American Navy” for his service in the Revolutionary War against Great Britain. He once wrote in a letter to a fellow patriot, “I wish to have no connection with any ship that does not sail fast; for I intend to go in harm’s way.”

Application: From the beginning, it was the Father’s intention to send His Son into harm’s way. Right after man’s fall into sin and ruin in Genesis 3, following the deceptive temptation of the serpent, God promised to send a descendant of Eve who would be bit by the serpent but who would also crush the serpent’s head. The rest of the Old Testament traces this promise, that God would send a descendant who would save His people from their sins.

Jesus is that descendant of Eve, Seth, Shem, Abraham, Judah, and David. He crushed the serpent's head while being snake-bitten on the cross of Calvary. Heb. 2:14-16, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (i.e., the nature of Abraham's descendant).

We need not fear death because Jesus died for us. God sent His Son to become the man Jesus to fulfill the promise He made to Eve and all those who came after her. He came that we might be saved. He came that we might have life. He came that we might love God.

His work was to enter harm's way, to lead a sinless life, to seek and save those who are lost, and then to go to the cross as our sin-bearer, suffer God's punishment for our sins, and rise again victoriously over our sin and our death. This is the assignment He was sent to finish, and finish it He did.

And just like the heroics of John Paul Jones bare witness that he deserves the title, "the Father of the American Navy," so the heroics of Jesus Christ as the unblemished Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world for sinners, testify that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that we must believe on Him to have life in His name. The Father bore witness to Him by sending Him into harm's way to work for us.

III. The Father bore witness by authoring the Scriptures (vv. 37-39, 45-47).

Application: We have learned from Exodus that Moses often heard the voice of the Lord (Exod. 33:11). Genesis tells us that Jacob saw the form of the Lord, a theophany (Gen. 32:30-31;

see Carson, 262). Jesus tells these Jews that they have done neither of these things (v. 37b). This is especially disturbing because they had Someone before them who was far better than what Moses heard and what Jacob had seen. Jesus was letting them hear God's voice as He spoke to them. He showed them God's form as the incarnate Son of God, the God-man (v. 38).

And so, in view of their spiritual deafness and blindness, Jesus tells them about something that could help. They had their Bibles (v. 39). These Jews thought they had eternal life because they belonged to a religious tradition that professed to believe the Bible ("in them ye think ye have eternal life"). Jesus lets them know that merely having a Bible is not enough. You have to search it, and while searching it you have to find Him throughout its pages ("these are they which testify of me").

The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). It describes itself as "living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). People are not unbelievers because they have read the Bible. They are unbelievers because they have not read it. Wherever the enemy is promoting unbelief, he is doing so by discouraging or even prohibiting the searching of Scripture.

I believe that verses 45-47 tell us that someday unbelievers will be judged by an open Bible, the book they refused to open in their unbelief. I think Rev. 20:12 tells us about that day: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." I believe "the books" of this verse are the books of the Bible.

Jesus warned other Jewish unbelievers in His day that the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South would stand in

judgment against them, because they had rejected the truth of Jesus (Matt. 12:41-42). There again, I believe the men of Nineveh will do so when the book of Jonah is opened and the Queen of the South will do so when the book of 1 Kings is opened. When the record of their faith is read, it will leave all who have rejected Christ without excuse, as it does even now.

In our passage, verses 45-47 say that the writings of Moses would accuse these unbelieving Jews because they did not find Jesus Christ in Moses's writings, even though He is everywhere there. He is there in the promises of a descendant made to Eve and the many others. He is there in the Passover lamb of the Exodus. He is there in the furniture of the tabernacle and the garments of the priests and the animals of the sacrifices. He is there in the prophetic promise of a better Moses in Deut. 18:15, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." The Father bore witness to the Son by authoring Scripture.

Conclusion: Elaine is one of the workers at our transfer station. She has a license plate on her car that says "BLEVGOD," and she parks her car next to the main trash bin opposite those who throw out their trash so that the plate cannot be missed.

Elaine's plate tells us to believe God, and the Apostle John tells us specifically what God the Father has said, which must be believed. Through John the Baptist, through the saving works of Christ, Whom He sent, and through the Scripture, God the Father has told us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that we must believe on Him to have life in His name.

Sadly, Jesus says of these Jews: "Him ye believe not" (v. 38). What would Jesus say about you? The Jews did not come to Jesus to have life from Him (v. 40). Have you? The Jews loved

the honor of men more than they loved God (vv. 41-44). What do you love more?

The judgment of Revelation 20 is a judgment of the dead, not of those who have the life of verse 40. Do you have that life? If not yet, then repent of your unbelief, and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Believe that He died on the cross for your sins and arose as your victorious Savior. Believe, and you will have life in His name.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*